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# The reconstruction of Colonial monuments in the 1920s and 1930s in Mexico

ELSA ARROYO AND SANDRA ZETINA

*Translation by Valerie Magar*

## **Abstract**

*This article presents an overview of the criteria and policies for the reconstruction of historical monuments from the viceregal period in Mexico, through the review of paradigmatic cases which contributed to the establishment of practices and guidelines developed since the 1920s, and that were extended at least until the middle of the last century. It addresses the conformation of the legal framework that gave rise to the guidelines for the protection and safeguard of built heritage, as well as the context of reassessment of the historical legacy through systematic studies of representative examples of Baroque art and its ornamental components, considered in a first moment as emblematic of Mexico's cultural identity. Based on case studies, issues related to the level of reconstruction of buildings are discussed, as well as the ideas at that time on the historical value of monuments and their function; and finally, it presents the results of the interventions in terms of their ability to maintain monuments as effective devices for the evocation of the past through the preservation of its material remains.*

**Keywords:** *reconstruction, viceregal heritage, neo-Colonial heritage*

## **Background: the first piece of legislation on monuments as property of the Mexican nation**

While the renovation process of the Museo Nacional was taking place in 1864 during the Second Empire (1863-1867) under the government of the Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg, social awareness grew about the value of objects and monuments of the past, as well as on their function as public elements capable of adding their share in the construction of the identity of the modern nation that the government intended to build in Mexico. The objects gathered in the Museo Nacional covered a wide range of scientific interests, including biological specimens, archaeological antiquities, works of art, and handicrafts, all of them considered unique examples of great symbolic importance to show the local and foreign visitor what was representative of Mexican culture. This kind of "scientific institutionalization" of culture, based on a space for exhibition, study, and public instruction, took many years to transform into a framework of conceptual and legal definition that would allow the protection of material remains of the cultures of the past.

It was towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the last presidential period of Porfirio Díaz (1884-1911), when the first piece of legislation was signed by which archaeological monuments were to be considered property of the Mexican nation. The draft of this legal document was officially presented by Joaquín Baranda, Secretary of State and of the Office of Justice and Public Instruction, and it included the diligent modifications made by archaeologist Alfredo Chavero. The text also reflected the serious concerns of Leopoldo Batres, Inspector and

Curator of Archaeological Monuments, in reaction to a long process of exploration, looting, and export of Mexican antiquities by foreign researchers, explorers, and tourists.<sup>1</sup> The decree was published on May 11, 1897, and in its first article it established that no one could exploit, remove, or restore existing archaeological monuments in Mexican territory without the express authorization of the Executive Power.<sup>2</sup>

The decree stands out for its interpretative scope since it specifically lists the types of work that should be considered subject to protection:

*[...] the ruins of cities, Casas Grandes, troglodyte rooms, fortifications, palaces, temples, pyramids, sculpted rocks or with inscriptions and, in general, all the buildings that under any aspect are interesting for the study of the civilization or history of the ancient settlers of Mexico*<sup>3</sup> (Decreto, 1897).<sup>4</sup>

Although the reception of the decree actually had a moderate impact on the State's policy in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its importance lies in having triggered a debate among academic circles about the value and meaning of national heritage and its defense in opposition to foreign interests. In its last statement, the seed for the need to extend the protection of monuments to those produced in other periods had already been planted, as they were fundamental for the study of the Mexican past. The door was therefore open to extend normative considerations to historical monuments, that is, to those erected after the Spanish conquest.

### Historiography on the history of viceregal architecture

The interest in the study of the viceregal past had a central niche among artists and intellectuals who were part of the academic staff of the Antigua Academia de San Carlos. Manuel Gustavo Revilla, jurist and historian, taught the history of Fine Arts at the Academia de San Carlos when he was commissioned by Román S. de Lascuráin, director of the institution, to write a book about the artistic productions of the viceroyalty as a contribution to the celebrations of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America in the framework of the Universal Exhibition of Chicago in 1893. In the publication by Manuel G. Revilla *El Arte en México en la época antigua y durante el gobierno virreinal*, a new perspective was expressed for the safeguarding and valuing of Colonial art. Revilla defended that the artistic production gathered during the three centuries of the viceroyalty of New Spain was best suited to represent the mestizo character of modern Mexican society, since at that time two races had merged, the indigenous and the European:

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<sup>1</sup> The problem of looting and illegal export of archaeological artifacts had notable cases, such as the mutilation and transport to London, in 1882, of Lintel 24 from Yaxchilán, Chiapas, undertaken by British explorer Alfred P. Maudslay. But it was really a continuous and increasing phenomenon until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Guillermo Palacios suggests that the trigger for interest in Mexican antiquities, especially those of the Mayan culture, was the World Columbian Exhibition, organized in Chicago in 1893 (Palacios, 2014: 8). On the looting of the Yaxchilán relief, see García Moll (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Published in Manuel Dublán y José María Lozano (1898, volume XXVII: 66-67). Consulted in Palacios (2014: 176-177).

<sup>3</sup> Original quotation: "[...] las ruinas de ciudades, las Casas Grandes, las habitaciones trogloditas, las fortificaciones, los palacios, templos, pirámides, rocas esculpidas o con inscripciones y, en general, todos los edificios que bajo cualquier aspecto sean interesantes para el estudio de la civilización o historia de los antiguos pobladores de México."

<sup>4</sup> Article 2, "Decreto por el cual los monumentos arqueológicos existentes en territorios mexicanos, son propiedad de la nación y nadie podrá explorarlos, removerlos, ni restaurarlos sin autorización expresa del Ejecutivo de la Unión" (Decreto, 1897).



*When the ancient kingdoms fell under the blow of the Spanish conquest, on the rubble of the ones destroyed other cities were established, or entirely new ones were founded. Religion and laws, ideas and practices quickly changed, merging two races and a new society sprouted with better germs of culture. In its shadow another art appeared, Christian art, more beautiful and finished than the indigenous one*<sup>5</sup> (Revilla, 1893: 20).

Revilla is also responsible for the first open and critical position on the protection of monuments, not only the Colonial ones but of the entire Mexican past. For example, when he referred in his book to the ruins of Mitla, in Oaxaca, the author affirmed that they were the most beautiful and best preserved of the entire indigenous past. At the same time, he took the opportunity to blame the local government for their state of abandonment, pointing out the lack of vigilance in the face of the destructive attitudes of visitors who took "fragments of the geometric decorations and of the frescoes that adorn the walls"<sup>6</sup> (Revilla, 1893: 15).

As Elisa García Barragán has pointed out, it is possible that Revilla may have been the author of a strong denunciation that appeared in 1903 in the national press against Justo Sierra, then Secretary of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, and Antonio Rivas Mercado, Director of the Academia de San Carlos, who seem to have supported the idea of auctioning off a part of the institution's painting collection (Revilla, 2006: 31). The text appeared in the newspaper *El País* and seems to have had an impact on the change of decisions about the fate of the objects that were finally distributed among the local government offices:

*What can we think of an agreement like the one we are dealing with, by virtue of which, instead of gathering, preserving, carefully safeguarding the monuments of national art, it is intended to sell them to the highest bidder, at a hammer auction, neither more nor less than how the pawnbrokers sell incunabula books and works of art that sometimes end in their hands, driven there by black necessity?* (Revilla, 1903).<sup>7</sup>

Shortly before the appearance of *El Arte en México en la época antigua y durante el gobierno virreinal*, around 1882, Vicente Riva Palacio, a prominent writer, jurist and military man during the government of Porfirio Díaz, finished the second volume of the encyclopedic work *México a través de los siglos*, intended to present a panoramic study on the history of the viceroyalty (1521-1821). The work of this conservative intellectual stood at the opposite extreme of Revilla's ideas. Towards the end of the section on the state of the Colony in science, literature and fine arts, he points out:

*[...] although during the 17<sup>th</sup> century a multitude of temples were built throughout the extension of New Spain, the best taste did not preside over their construction, nor were they the work of privileged intelligences; only the cathedrals of Mexico and Puebla de los Ángeles can be distinguished among them*<sup>8</sup> (Riva Palacio, 1882: 749).

<sup>5</sup> Original quotation: "Al caer los reinos antiguos al golpe de la conquista española, sobre los escombros de las destruidas, establecieronse otras ciudades, o se fundaron algunas enteramente nuevas. Religión y leyes, ideas y usos cambiaron presto, fundiéndose dos razas y brotó nueva sociedad con mejores gérmenes de cultura. A su sombra apareció otro arte, el arte cristiano, más hermoso y acabado que el indígena."

<sup>6</sup> Original quotation: "fragmentos de las grecas y de los frescos que adornan los muros."

<sup>7</sup> Communication published in *El País*, México, on September 26, 1903, consulted in Rodríguez Prampolini (1997: 582-583).

<sup>8</sup> Original quotation: "[...] aunque durante el siglo XVII se levantaron en toda la extensión de Nueva España multitud de templos, sin embargo, no presidió en la construcción de ellos el mejor gusto ni fueron la obra de privilegiadas inteligencias; distinguiéronse sólo entre ellos las catedrales de México y de Puebla de los Ángeles."

As it had happened with the boom in interest in the “antiquities” of the pre-Columbian world, it was also the viewpoint of “the other” that would awaken the appreciation for historical elements produced after the Conquest. The presence of foreign architects hired during the regime of Porfirio Díaz had only just begun to draw attention to the importance of the most representative building projects of the viceroyalty in New Spain. One of the characters who most influenced the reassessment of “Colonial” art in Mexico was the English architect Charles S. Hall who arrived in Mexico around 1888, and was commissioned to build the municipal palace of Puebla, in an eclectic style where he mixed “neo-Colonial” elements. He was also responsible for the construction of the chapel of the English cemetery in Mexico City in 1913, which reproduces the style of Colonial 18<sup>th</sup> century constructions, and could be, as suggested by Clara Bargellini, the first complete neo-Colonial construction that was erected in Mexico (Figure 1).<sup>9</sup>



FIGURE 1. CHAPEL OF THE ENGLISH CEMETERY IN MEXICO CITY. Col. Archivo Casasola, Fototeca Nacional. Image: Mediateca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, MID: 77\_20140827-134500:89756, D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

In 1901, the book *Spanish-colonial architecture* by Sylvester Baxter was published in Boston, which collects and synthesizes the information that Manuel G. Revilla had published in the past. However, his work also offered a different vision, “from the outside,” where other aspects of Mexican culture were explored that were fundamental in the way in which viceregal architecture was studied and valued during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Baxter had met architect Hall in Puebla while working with the local stonemasons due to his interest in harmonizing the façade of the municipal palace with the strong presence of Puebla’s cathedral. Thus, Baxter highlights in his book the recognition of the tradition of the indigenous Mexican stonemasons –heirs of a rich knowledge coined during the viceregal era– a remarkable aspect for the recovery of the original appearance of the buildings. With this, he can be placed in a notable line in the field

<sup>9</sup> For the author, it was in the context of the architecture during the regime of Porfirio Díaz that the “neo” Colonial or neo-Spanish architecture was developed (Bargellini, 1994: 426).



of the conservation of monuments, that of recovering traditional techniques: “[...] he would obtain most admirable results by means of charming heads, graceful garlands, and other attractive ornamental details –All animated with the vital spirit conferred by intelligent hands creatively employed” (Baxter, 1901: 21).

The context in which Sylvester Baxter completed his work on viceregal architecture has been well studied by Clara Bargellini (1995), placing the interest of the architects of Boston and New York in a process of assimilation of all the styles of the world in order to provide strong historical foundations to a society that was rising as the head of the capitalist system and that already glimpsed, with some fear, its own contradictions. For Baxter, the “Spanish-colonial architecture of New Spain represents not only the first, but the most important development of the depictive arts in the New World under European influences that has taken place up to the time when the movement in the United States began to bear its present fruit” (Baxter, 1901: xi). At the same time, he took advantage of his introduction to denounce that the Mexican government had not guaranteed the conditions for the protection to the viceregal heritage as it had done with archaeological monuments. The same happened with other studies by intellectuals of the time. Not by chance, when art historian Manuel Toussaint wrote the introduction to the translation of Baxter’s book into Spanish, he took the same character of denunciation against the pre-revolutionary government and the enormous ignorance about the artistic productions of the three viceregal centuries (Toussaint, 1934: V).

For Toussaint, Baxter’s book represented the most complete study of viceregal Mexican architecture and, together with the work of Manuel G. Revilla, they served as the basis for the development of a new vision of historical monuments. In 1915, another fundamental publication came off the press: *La patria y la arquitectura nacional* by architect Federico Mariscal, a collection of a series of lectures given at the Universidad Popular; their axis of explanation placed emphasis on the works of the cathedral of Mexico City and the *sagrario metropolitano*,<sup>10</sup> outstanding examples of the art of the period. In addition, it included a sort of “reasoned catalogue” on the architectural works of the country’s capital and its surroundings. In his book, Mariscal offers a much broader notion of monuments than that considered by his predecessors; he included “houses next to the palaces,”<sup>11</sup> civil works and those of lesser importance, such as hermitages, addressing them not only from an artistic perspective, but also as means for social development. The architect presented himself as a legitimate defender of the heritage built in the viceregal era: “in order to initiate a true crusade against its destruction”<sup>12</sup> (Mariscal, 1915: 7).

In June 1922, Mariscal wrote a short travel note while visiting the state of Hidalgo, in Mexico. This text was intended to present the “discovery” of a viceregal jewel: the former convent of San Andrés Epazoyucan. With the amazement produced by finding this semi-abandoned complex, but still bearing testimony of what must have been an ambitious evangelizing project during its foundation by the order of saint Augustine in 1540, he described the contemporary population of Epazoyucan as a “miserable village” and he devoted several paragraphs to explaining the mural program that decorated the cloister of the convent. It was a series of remarkable paintings that reminded him of the Flemish and Italian art of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mariscal, 1922: 42-43). This “discovery” led to immediate attention by local authorities, thus beginning the conservation and rehabilitation initiatives of the site, although its rescue and rehabilitation would extend until the 1970s (Abundis, 1989: 33-50).

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<sup>10</sup> A smaller church adjoining the cathedral in Mexico City (note by the translator).

<sup>11</sup> Original quotation: “las casas laterales a los palacios.”

<sup>12</sup> Original quotation: “a fin de iniciar una verdadera cruzada en contra de su destrucción.”

Mariscal is also responsible for the introductory text to the book *La arquitectura en México: iglesias*, a large-scale educational project proposed by Genaro García, director of the Museo Nacional, to commemorate the first centenary of Mexico's Independence (Cortés y García, 1914). In this text, he defends the idea of considering as "Mexican architecture" the buildings of the viceregal era, pointing out their differences and singularities with respect to Spanish architecture. His proposal is to highlight the value of originality of the local works, demonstrating that they were not a transplant of Spanish forms but a genuine development in a very different social and economic context. For the architect, the key to understanding the value of viceregal art lies in its mestizo character:

*The current Mexican citizen, the one who forms the majority of the population, is the result of a material, moral and intellectual mixture of the Spanish race and the aboriginal races that populated the Mexican soil. Therefore, Mexican architecture has to be the one that emerged and developed during the three viceregal centuries in which it constituted what is in essence "the Mexican" who later developed in an independent life*<sup>13</sup> (Mariscal, 1915: 10).

In fact, the idea of "impurity" as a virtue and source of originality of viceregal art circulated among the intellectual circles of the time. Within Genaro García's project for the edition of *La arquitectura en México*, the architect and essayist Jesús T. Acevedo, a member of the Youth Athenaeum, also collaborated by offering the conference entitled "Colonial architecture in Mexico" –published posthumously with an introduction by Federico Mariscal– for which he would be remembered as a true defender of viceregal monuments (Acevedo, 1920a). With a historicist look, Acevedo affirmed in this brief presentation that the art of New Spain was the result of the cultural shock, legitimizing itself from the power structures imposed after the Colony on indigenous populations:

*The [architectural] orders did not reach these lands in their original purity. The adventurous captains were unable to understand the secular truths that they contained and, above all, they came absolutely devoid of elements to evoke, with unknown materials and workers of another race, the noble harmonies of the most genuinely Latin art*<sup>14</sup> (Acevedo, 1920a: 7).

In addition, following the historiographic line already indicated from the works of Manuel G. Revilla and Sylvester Baxter, Acevedo retrieved the idea that Baroque art, and specifically, that represented by the ornamental forms of the "Churrigueresque" –particularly in the works of the cathedral of Mexico and the sagrario metropolitano– had been the most noble and original contribution of art from the era of New Spain. For modern intellectuals it was fundamental to establish the character of what was truly "Mexican," and the art produced by the Colonial society, the houses with their central patios, the use of native materials and the administrative buildings were direct testimonies of the complex structures where the nation was born, a mixture of two cultures. As Clara Bargellini has pointed out, in the context of

<sup>13</sup> Original quotation: "El ciudadano mexicano actual, el que forma la mayoría de la población, es el resultado de una mezcla material, moral e intelectual de la raza española y de las razas aborígenes que poblaron el suelo mexicano. Por tanto, la arquitectura mexicana tiene que ser la que surgió y se desarrolló durante los tres siglos virreinales en los que constituyó 'el mexicano' que después se ha desarrollado en vida independiente."

<sup>14</sup> Original quotation: "Los órdenes [arquitectónicos] no llegaron a estas tierras con su original pureza. Los capitanes aventureros estaban imposibilitados para comprender las verdades seculares que aquellos encierran y sobre todo, venían absolutamente desprovistos de elementos para evocar, con materiales desconocidos y obreros de otra raza, las nobles armonías del arte más genuinamente latino."



post-revolutionary Mexico “the notion of Mexican was identified with an expression that was perceived in those years as anti-Classical and transgressive, but of great originality and vigor, just the image that could serve for the affirmation of a new nation”<sup>15</sup> (Bargellini, 1994: 429).

### The pioneering works of architectural reconstruction in viceregal buildings

The readaptation and expansion projected by architect Samuel Chávez between 1902 and 1910 of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria<sup>16</sup> (ENP), housed in the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso<sup>17</sup> (today the Museo del Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso), is one of the most interesting and early examples of mimetic interventions of the heritage from New Spain and a bet to rebuild the glory of Baroque art as a symbol of national identity. In this intervention project, Samuel Chávez foreshadowed the path of architecture in the post-revolutionary years, and he put into practice the reassessment of viceregal heritage. Chávez intervened in the old building, creating new openings and doors, and restructuring at least one of its sides to unite, in a visible and indelible manner, the old buildings with his architectural project. The annex of the ENP tried to emulate the splendor of the original building, in its architectural program, proportions and constituent elements: ornamentation, decorative elements and distribution, without taking into account the problem of creating a historical fake (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. FAÇADE OF THE COLEGIO CHICO (SAN ILDEFONSO STREET), ANTIGUO COLEGIO DE SAN ILDEFONSO, MEXICO CITY. Image: Pedro Cuevas, Archivo Fotográfico “Manuel Toussaint”, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM.

<sup>15</sup> Original quotation: “lo mexicano se identificó con una expresión que se percibía en aquellos años como anticlásica y transgresora, pero de gran originalidad y vigor, justo la imagen que podía servir para la afirmación de una nueva nación.”

<sup>16</sup> National Preparatory School (note from the translator).

<sup>17</sup> Former School of San Ildefonso (note from the translator).

Samuel Chávez was a professor at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes<sup>18</sup> (ENBA) where, together with Nicolás Mariscal, he promoted a new curriculum that integrated knowledge about the inheritance from New Spain. He was also interested in the safeguard and conservation of Colonial monuments, organized by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Together with Nicolás Mariscal and architect Guillermo Heredia, in 1906 he was part of a commission charged with “examining which constructions deserve to last, as well as carrying out the appropriate repairs”<sup>19</sup> (*La Voz de México*, March 25, 1906: 2). The commission analyzed the monumental heritage, and in particular the colonial buildings “wishing to preserve them as historical relics.”<sup>20</sup> They issued, as a commission, “some provisions in order to avoid their destruction,”<sup>21</sup> and they refer to “true monumental works.”<sup>22</sup> For example, they decreed the conservation of the church of La Enseñanza, although their scope of action also extended to the states (*La Voz de México*, 1906: 2).

The Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso is possibly one of the best preserved Colonial educational buildings. It is composed of three buildings from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Colegio Chico, the oldest, is located to the East, and was built between 1712 and 1718 by Rector Pedro Zorrilla. Later, between 1727 and 1742, Rector Cristóbal Escobar y Llamas built the two adjoining buildings of greater size and splendor: the Colegio de Pasantes located in the heart of the complex, and to the West, the Colegio Grande.<sup>23</sup>

A singularity of these buildings is the integration of form and function. The north side of these last two buildings is an enormous double-height vaulted corridor, in which the two central spaces of Jesuit collegiate life were projected: the chapel in the Colegio de Pasantes, and the general assembly hall (today known as El Generalito) at the Colegio Grande. In them, the double height was used to eliminate the windows on the first level of the façade, so that the rest and study spaces were isolated from the noise of the street.<sup>24</sup> The façades of the three schools are integrated into an interesting harmony achieved through proportions, renderings and ornamentation: walls made with tezontle contrast with facades, pilasters, cornices and mixtilinear windows made from basalt and andesite, creating a rhythmic harmony (Rojas, 1951).

The building of the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso shone among New Spain’s heritage both for its splendid architecture, possibly one of the first to use the estipite pillar, a symbol of the local Baroque,<sup>25</sup> but also because it had preserved its educational function since its creation until that moment. However, originally the premises were mainly intended for residential uses and the Jesuit school functioned more like a boarding school than a school in

<sup>18</sup> National School of Fine Arts (note from the translator).

<sup>19</sup> Original quotation: “examinar que construcciones merecen perdurar, así como llevar a cabo las reparaciones convenientes.”

<sup>20</sup> Original quotation: “deseando conservarlas cual reliquias históricas.”

<sup>21</sup> Original quotation: “algunas disposiciones a fin de evitar que se destruyan.”

<sup>22</sup> Original quotation: “verdaderas obras monumentales.”

<sup>23</sup> On the history of this building, there is a wide historiography (Rojas, 1951: 34, 41-43; Marroquí, 1900; Decorme, 1941; Alegre, 1841).

<sup>24</sup> On this subject, Manuel Toussaint mentioned that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century “the buildings for education have more or less the same aspect, but it is perhaps in their external façades where the monumental character begins to be defined: large walls with small high windows, indicating that the work of intelligence must not be disturbed by the noises in the street” (“los edificios de educación presentan más o menos el mismo aspecto, es quizá en su exterior que empieza a marcarse el carácter del monumento: grandes muros con pequeñas ventanas altas para indicar que el trabajo de la inteligencia no debe ser molestado por el ruido de la calle”) (Toussaint, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> The stipe pilaster and the exuberance of the so-called Churrigueresque baroque was considered a very particular marker of the local imagination. Rojas Garcidueñas ventured that the facade of the Colegio Chico (today the Museo de la Luz) inaugurated in 1718 was one of the earliest constructions decorated with estípites, contemporary to the Altar of the Kings in the metropolitan cathedral, a work of the same year by Jerónimo de Balbás and considered by Manuel Toussaint as the earliest use of the estipite pilaster (Rojas, 1951: 78; Toussaint, 1990: 148).



the modern sense: teachers and students lived there, and although certain courses, liturgical and theatrical events or literary classes were held in the general classroom and the chapel, most of the students took their lessons at the university and at other schools, such as San Pedro and San Pablo (Rojas, 1951).

The building of the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso is currently highly modified, not only due to Chávez's intervention, but also due to its tortuous history, since it had several successive changes of administration and periods of abandonment due to political upheaval.<sup>26</sup> The complete facilities of the three colleges only functioned for about twenty or thirty years under the Jesuits (between 1740-1749 when it was completed and 1767, when the order was expelled), and from then on it underwent several modifications. For example, it was intervened to repair the serious damage caused by the 1776 earthquake on the façades, the vault of the general hall and some rooms. Other alterations were necessary when adapting the spaces to create classrooms for a large number of students, up to 900 in 1910 (Rojas, 1951: 44-46).

When Chávez planned to add a fourth building to the complex on the south side, to expand the ENP and open an access from the street of Montealegre (today Justo Sierra Street)<sup>27</sup> the building had already undergone several repairs and modifications.

Samuel Chávez's intervention lasted approximately eight years, but it grew in magnitude. He began with a project to adapt the Colonial buildings in 1902, but the spaces seemed insufficient for the new needs of the ENP and by 1904 José Yves Limantour, then Minister of the Treasury, promoted the implementation of a general plan to include, in addition to the remodeling, the construction of the annex of the ENP.<sup>28</sup>

The general intervention plan of the ENP responded to the total renovation of the educational system promoted by Justo Sierra, Minister of Public Instruction, who planned both the creation of a new curriculum for the ENP (approved in 1903 and issued in 1907) as part of the total restructuring of public education in the country.<sup>29</sup> Sierra had worked for a long time and sought that the foundation of the Universidad Nacional that would function as "coordinator of all the elements of national education"<sup>30</sup> coincided with the celebrations of the centenary of Independence, in 1910.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> When it lost the Jesuit tutelage in 1767 it was left in the hands of the secular clergy and the viceregal government. After the Independence, it returned to the hands of the Jesuits for a short time, and it also functioned as a barracks during the French intervention. It was until the founding of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria under the mandate of Benito Juárez in 1867 and the direction of Gabino Barreda that its occupation was stabilized again.

<sup>27</sup> The land on Montealegre Street (today Justo Sierra Street) on which the extension of the ENP was built had always belonged to the Colegio de San Ildefonso, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were sold to pay for repairs to the building. In 1902 they were reacquired.

<sup>28</sup> The reforms of the old school were carried out by architect Manuel Torres Torrija between 1902 and 1906, following the plans and instructions of Samuel Chávez. The construction of the annex, both in its projection and implementation was undertaken by Chávez (1911: 3-5).

<sup>29</sup> The curriculum of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria was approved by executive decree on December 15, 1903, but was only issued on January 17, 1907. This plan specified that the interest was to provide physical, intellectual and moral education, to through free, secular, uniform teaching in a five-year program. English, French, in addition to mathematics (geometry, algebra) Greek, drawing, literature, physics, cosmography and mechanics, chemistry and mineralogy, botany, geography, zoology, human anatomy and physiology, psychology, logic, general history and homeland, moral. See *Anuarios escolares de la Secretaría de Instrucción Pública. Bellas Artes, II, Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, 1910-1911* (1910: 11-15).

<sup>30</sup> Original quotation: "coordinadora de todos los elementos de la educación nacional."

<sup>31</sup> The curriculum was controversial since the ENP was founded with a positivist orientation under Gabino Barreda's program, and the successive adjustments that were made to the curriculum were discussed at length in the press. Justo Sierra obtained extraordinary powers as Minister of Education to reform education, and to create the Universidad Nacional as a "coordinator of all elements of national education." Regarding the curriculum of ENP, it included again the study of artistic literature, psychology and history, as well as subjects such as geology, mineralogy and sociology for higher studies. Since 1906, a speech by Justo Sierra was published in the newspaper *El Imparcial* (May 21) in which he mentioned that the creation of the Universidad Nacional would possibly coincide with the Centennial of the Independence (Díaz y de Ovando, 2006: 273).

Based on rationalist and hygienist theories, Samuel Chávez took lighting as the fundamental theme of the remodeling, but he also sought to solve problems of distribution and adaptation of spaces for physical and scientific activities (gymnasium, library, science classrooms with equipment, display cabinets for the museum).<sup>32</sup>

The intervention was very extensive, doors or windows were opened in practically all the walls that led to the courtyards, and sometimes the openings were completely lowered to install windows and floor-to-ceiling doors, as was the case of the second floor of the Colegio de Pasantes. The third floor corridor of the Colegio Grande was also modified to accommodate the Physics Academies; in the chapel, more desks and shelves were added to those that Alfonso Herrera had already placed to constitute the library, and offices were made on the second floor. Large side doors were opened in El Generalito and the Library. All the spaces were reinforced with iron and sheet joist ceilings, "without the buildings losing their architectural character,"<sup>33</sup> that is, without modifying the arches, although that intervention was unfinished, leaving apparent the areas that were planned to be covered with flat ceilings.<sup>34</sup>

All of these modifications were made while construction of the annex began. In 1905 the inauguration of the ground floor of the Colegio Grande was announced, the press reported that it was necessary to "adapt the old construction to the accommodation of modern sciences,"<sup>35</sup> and noted that the original apartments of the college, despite their "solidity and duration,"<sup>36</sup> lacked beauty, comfort, and adequate lighting.<sup>37</sup> The note also commented on the adequacy of a modern physics laboratory, but pointed out that a work "of greater importance"<sup>38</sup> was being projected: the amphitheater "whose elegant and original façade"<sup>39</sup> designed by Samuel Chávez, would face the street of Montealegre, today Justo Sierra Street.

The largest and most daring project was the construction of the annex in a mimetic style, south of the Colegio Grande. In his report, Chávez highlighted the ornamental integration of the new building, but he did not describe in detail the interventions that were necessary to tie the two ensembles, which were then connected. When studying the historical plans and comparing them with current aerial photographs, it is possible to see that he had to destroy the spaces on the south side of the Colegio Grande (he only respected the arches) to give more space to the new amphitheater (Figure 3).

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<sup>32</sup> Chávez said "when thinking about how to give light to those apartments, I considered that it was essential to solve the problem of adaptation of the buildings that our ancestors have bequeathed us to modern needs, giving all preference to the problem of lighting; for this, at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, it was necessary to open large clearings, which the old buildings lacked" ("al pensar en la manera de dar luz a esos departamentos, consideré que era indispensable resolver el problema de adaptación de los edificios que nos han legado nuestros antepasados a las necesidades modernas, dando toda preferencia al problema de la iluminación; para esto, en la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria era forzoso abrir grandes claros, de los que carecían los edificios antiguos") (Chávez, 1911: 3).

<sup>33</sup> Original quotation: "sin que los edificios perdieran su carácter arquitectónico."

<sup>34</sup> Chávez planned to cover these additions with plafonds wrought with Roebbling wiring "cubrir estos añadidos con cielos planos forjados sobre alambreado Roebbling" (Chávez, 1911: 1).

<sup>35</sup> Original quotation: "adaptar la vieja construcción al hospedaje de las ciencias modernas."

<sup>36</sup> Original quotation: "solidez y duración."

<sup>37</sup> In those apartments the dining rooms and the kitchen were installed in order to respect the old spaces, as well as the apartment attached to the gymnasium for the students' dressing room and bathroom, and a modern "engine" was integrated to pump water to the water tanks so that between 80 and 100 students could bathe. See: "Por la Preparatoria. Importantes obras materiales de adaptación y de ampliación" (*El imparcial*, 1905: 3).

<sup>38</sup> Original quotation: "de mayor importancia."

<sup>39</sup> Original quotation: "cuya fachada elegante y original."



# ESCUELA N. PREPARATORIA.

Obras de adaptación y ampliación proyectadas

hasta la fecha y en gran parte ejecutadas.

México, Marzo de 1911

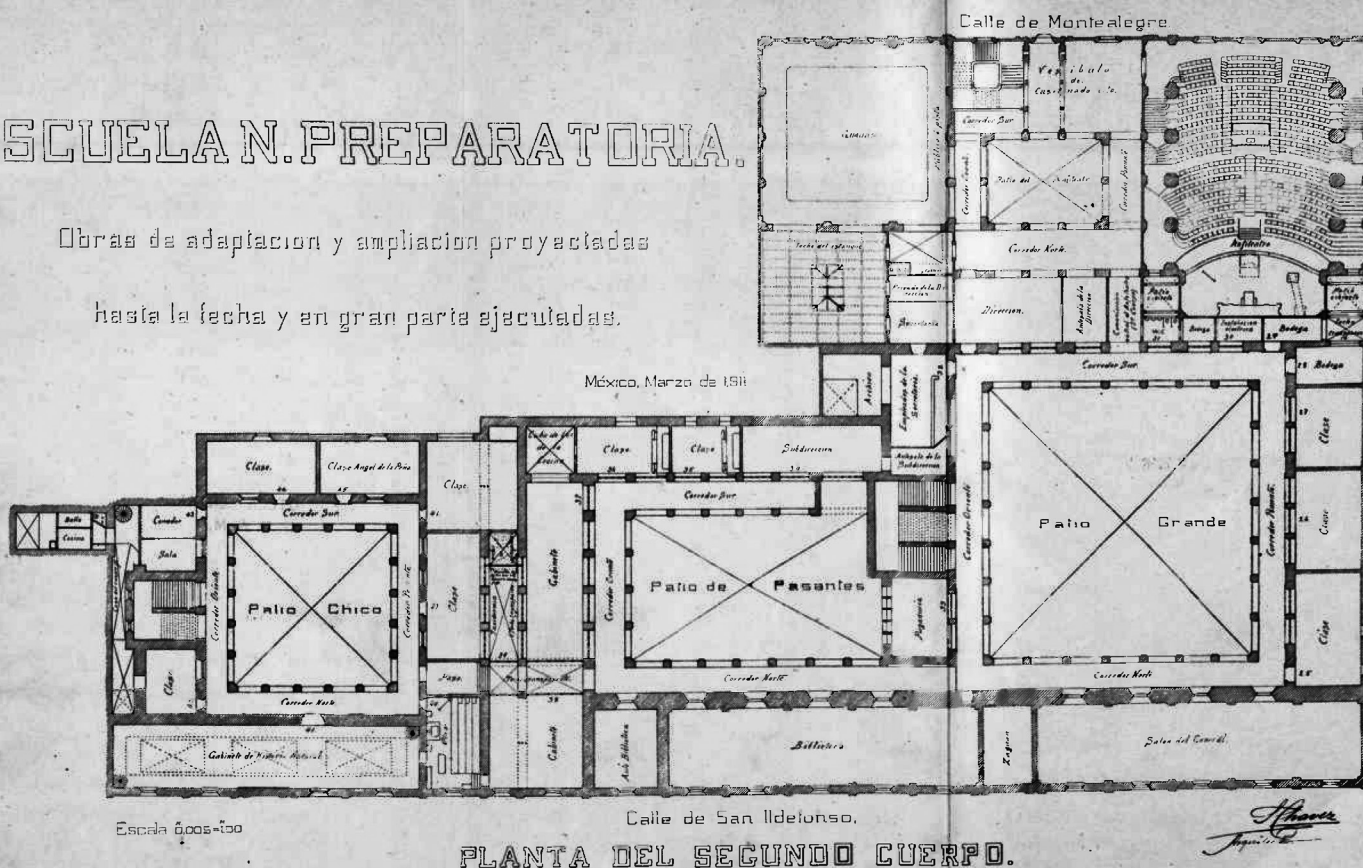


FIGURE 3. PLAN OF THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE ADAPTATION AND ENLARGEMENT WORKS OF THE ENP PROJECTED BY SAMUEL CHÁVEZ, 1910. Image: Chávez, 1911.

Chávez based his proposal on the study of ornamentation, the distribution of spaces and colonial construction systems to “preserve the style of the old construction”,<sup>40</sup> but he resorted to the novel Hennebique system of reinforced concrete to solve the problems of the foundations and for the vault of the amphitheatre (Zetina, 2019: 132-140; Silva, 2016: 207-219). The architect sought to continue and reconcile Colonial forms with reinforced concrete; he combined apparent cement with ornamental details in stone, and he also used stone elements as formwork for concrete (Chávez, 1911: 8).

To design the façade, Chávez studied the portal of the Colegio Chico, but he made his own proposal for more decorated estipite pillars, which constituted the motif that visually integrated the new to the old architecture. Although it imitated the main original elements (the basalt or andesite plinth, the carved stone cornices, the mixtilinear profiles, the estipite pillars and the tezontle ashlars), one cannot say that it is a recreation, since the more regularly cut stone blocks (possibly obtained with mechanical tools), and the proportions of the openings, and the more regular, flatter and symmetrical design still denote his academic training (Figure 4).

<sup>40</sup> Original quotation: “conservar el estilo de la construcción antigua.”

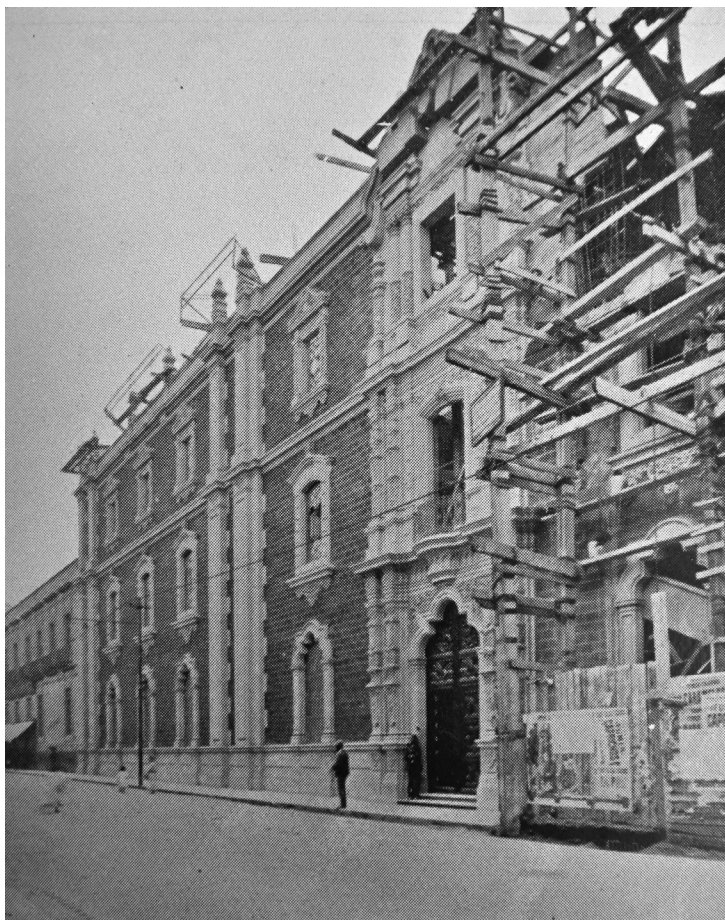


FIGURE 4. FAÇADE OF THE ANNEX IN 1910. *Image: Chávez, 1911.*

For the distribution of the spaces, he was inspired by the old buildings, but gave priority to the interiors: he projected two large double-height vaulted spaces for the amphitheater and the gymnasium –reflecting the design of the general hall and the chapel–, communicated by a small central courtyard, where he emulated the Jesuit arcades on a smaller scale. In its first two levels, the annex only served to house the amphitheater and the gymnasium as symbols of the spirit of positivist education: intellectual and physical education occupied the same space, and only the third level of the building would be used for classrooms, offices, and a teachers' room.

The amphitheater was the main reason for the building. Chávez was looking for a space of great magnitude and solemnity, an emblematic place for conferences and public events that would function in the manner of a secular temple, "with the monumental and rich character that a temple requires"<sup>41</sup> (Chávez, 1911: 8). By combining Colonial forms and innovative construction systems, it was possible for him to project an audacious vault with a very long shaft, supported by five pairs of wide columns profusely ornamented with estipites and acanthus leaves, and he covered the wide arches with coffers and floral decorations. In the center of the vault, he installed a ceiling made of glass blocks that allowed sunlight to be transmitted, with a system that could be covered through sliding panels and the space also had electric lighting, a sign of modernity (Figure 5).

<sup>41</sup> Original quotation: "con el carácter monumental y de riqueza que un templo requiere."





FIGURE 5. VAULT OF THE AMPHITHEATRE OF THE ENP, ANNEX, 1910. *Image: Chávez, 1911.*

Both in his choice of a mimetic style, the use of viceregal models and the implementation of the project, Chávez manifested a position against the prevailing eclectic academic style and its European models. It is very likely that the project of the ENP was informed by the careful reading and application of the ideas from Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. Chávez was a professor of ornamentation at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, and he had a wide collection of publications by the French architect; he proposed the study of Colonial architecture as part of a renovation of the academy (Zetina, 2019: 122-128).<sup>42</sup> Just as Viollet-le-Duc recovered the Gothic style to root French architecture in the local tradition, and promoted ornamentation as a process of recovery of techniques, materials, and craftsmanship practices to put all of society into operation, Chávez encouraged the creation and revitalization of local craft industries for their work in the annex factory, since all the decorative elements (the carved stone, glass blocks and colored stained glass that decorated all the windows) were made in Mexico, partly inspired by models of viceregal art.

The project was never completed as Chávez planned. During the inauguration in 1910, only the amphitheater, the central courtyard, the staircase and half of the façade had been completed. The outbreak of the Revolution truncated the work, which was taken up again twenty years later by architect Pablo Flores, who modified the original project to build a second courtyard with spaces for offices instead of the gymnasium (Rojas, 1951: 49-50). Flores continued Chávez's ornamental program by completing the façade, he used part of his plans to open a new access on which he symmetrically replicated the amphitheater portal.

Despite being unfinished, the continuity between the old section and the new era in Chávez's project was so faintly perceptible that the chronicles of the inauguration highlighted as a virtue the mimetic character of the intervention, as well as the recovery of Colonial models, instead of Classical ones, and the revitalization of the craftsmanship of the stonemasons. With pride the chronicler stated:

<sup>42</sup> Chávez, in collaboration with Nicolás Mariscal, had proposed a new curriculum for the ENBA, which for the first time proposed the study of Colonial monuments.



*Not a single one of the people who visited the amphitheater that day immediately understood that this archaic architecture, given the purest style that it evokes in its lines and for its superb and large columns carved with the art of ancient stonemasons, was of this period, made in our days and without using the old models but rather the style of the times of the viceroys. Because in effect, one could believe that the perfection of the artists and craftsmen of the Colonial period could be equaled in this time, given the stamp of majesty and grandeur they imprinted on their works*<sup>43</sup> (*El Imparcial*, 1910).<sup>44</sup>

He believed that the inability of the attendees to distinguish the new section from the old one was proof of the success of the project and in fact, at that time it was considered that Chávez had managed to revive the old splendor of Colonial art, thereby opening the vein to the neo-Colonial current with a clear sense of identity. The Churrigueresque Baroque represented the nation, in its exuberance rendered in stone. It revived local craft traditions, and distanced itself from Classical European models. Chávez's intervention in San Ildefonso was a gamble in favor of a national style in the face of the eclectic Eurocentric current, in State commissions such as the emblematic Palace of the Ministry of Communications and Public Works (today the Museo Nacional de Arte) whose architecture and interiors were made by European architects and craftsmen, with imported models and finishing materials.

These concepts remained fashionable until the emergence of the avant-garde, functionalism dictated the death of ornament and the recovery of any style of the past, but it was a very slow transition, with successive waves of revival (Fierro Gossman, 1998). The neo-Colonial style was in full swing during the 1920s and 1930s, and at the same time the study, cataloguing and conservation of viceregal architecture was promoted.

Later, the intervention of the ENP would be harshly criticized. José Rojas Garcidueñas, a scholar of the architectural complex, pointed out that the façade has a "rigid academic symmetry" far removed from the baroque exuberance. He also pointed out its lack of originality, flaws in the details of the carvings, additions of grotesques "inappropriate for the 18<sup>th</sup> century Baroque that they aim at suggesting",<sup>45</sup> as well as the "not very vigorous"<sup>46</sup> carving methods. However, for this author the fundamental error of Chávez was "having tried to imitate or copy an architecture that was no longer current, having used absolutely inappropriate elements and forms and putting dead forms into practice"<sup>47</sup> (Rojas, 1952: 53)

Undoubtedly, the intervention of the ENP was a precursor both of the neo-Colonial style in post-revolutionary architecture, as well as of very invasive mimetic interventions that somehow tried to "improve" the past. The ideological character of these interventions is evident, for example, in successive years several of the most emblematic buildings of the capital's *zócalo*<sup>48</sup> were rebuilt with similar criteria, to unify the square in Baroque style, chosen as the one that best represented the national character. The expansion and renovation of the old City Hall

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<sup>43</sup> Original quotation: "Ni una sola de las personas que visitaron en aquel día el anfiteatro comprendieron de pronto que aquella arquitectura arcaica, por el más puro estilo que evoca en sus lineamientos y por sus soberbias y grandes columnas labradas con el arte de los canteros antiguos, era de esta época, hecha en nuestros días y sin emplear los modelos antiguos sino el estilo de los tiempos de los virreyes. Porque en efecto, se creería que no se pudiera igualar en perfección en esta época a la que artífices y artistas de la Colonia descollaron poniendo su sello de majestad y grandiosidad en sus obras."

<sup>44</sup> "Nuevo anfiteatro de la Escuela Preparatoria. Llamó poderosamente la atención de los visitantes por su belleza arquitectónica," *El imparcial*, México, 27 de septiembre de 1910.

<sup>45</sup> Original quotation: "impropias del barroco dieciochesco que quiere sugerir."

<sup>46</sup> Original quotation: "poco vigorosa."

<sup>47</sup> Original quotation: "haber pretendido imitar o copiar una arquitectura inactual, el haber usado elementos y formas absolutamente improcedentes y poner en práctica formas muertas."

<sup>48</sup> Main square in Mexico City's historic centre, note from the translator.

by Manuel Gorozpe in 1909 and of the National Palace by Augusto Petriccioli in 1925, added entirely new floors and they created coatings and ornamentation in Baroque style in basalt and tezontle in the Plaza Mayor. The operation was completed with the construction of the Majestic Hotel by Rafael Goyeneche in 1925, so that the only authentic monuments that remain today are the metropolitan cathedral with its *sagrario* metropolitano, and part of the Monte de Piedad (Fierro, 1998: 25-30) (Figure 6).

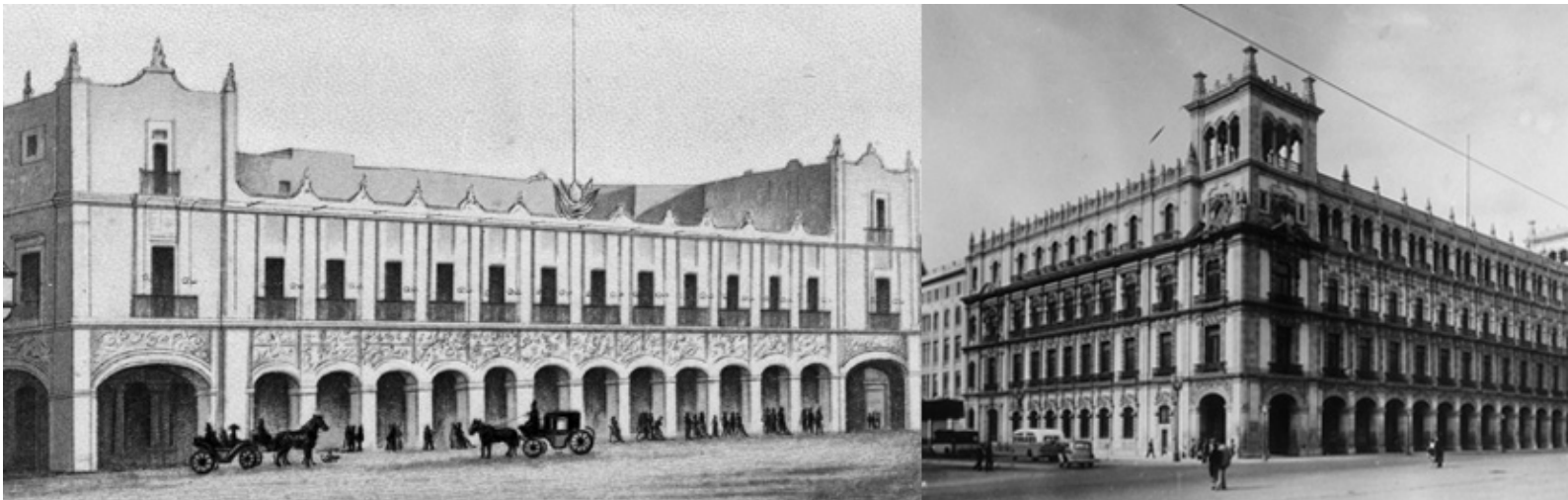


FIGURE 6. BUILDING OF THE CITY HALL OF MEXICO CITY. Before (ca. 1895) and after Manuel Gorozpe's intervention (ca. 1931). Image: Archivo Casasola ©Fototeca Nacional-INAH.

In this panorama, the architectural solutions presented by Chávez for the annex of the ENP emerge as a fundamental precedent of the neo-Colonial architecture that would be adopted by the nascent revolutionary state in its official construction programs. In the subsequent years, the neo-Colonial was so broadly accepted and was so prolific during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that it reconfigured Mexico City and several of the new residential developments (Fierro, 1998: 29-30). Paradoxically, despite the significant number of interventions on ancient monuments and the creation of new buildings, this period has been scarcely studied, due to its conservative character and its strong ornamental component, which sets it so far apart from the path of the avant-garde.<sup>49</sup>

### The reconstruction of convent complexes in the 1930s: the case of the former Augustinian convent of Acolman

In January 1934, the *Ley sobre protección y conservación de monumentos arqueológicos e históricos, poblaciones típicas y lugares de belleza natural* (Act on protection and conservation of archaeological and historical monuments, typical towns, and places of natural beauty) was published. Its first article already considers the historical value within the definition of monument: "monuments are composed of movable objects and buildings of archaeological origin and those whose protection and conservation are of public interest due to their historical value."<sup>50</sup> It integrates a notion of temporary nature for historical assets, noting

<sup>49</sup> In this regard, Silvia Teresa González Calderón considers that it was precisely Diego Rivera and José Villagrán who characterized neo-Colonial architecture as a decorative style, as "cake architecture." The author also highlights the gap in research between the academic eclectic architecture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the modern architecture of 1925, and analyzes, as mentioned below, the concerns within the academy and among Atheneists (González Calderón, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Original quotation: "se consideran monumentos las cosas muebles e inmuebles de origen arqueológico y aquellas cuya protección y conservación sean de interés público por su valor histórico."

that these include those produced after the Conquest and it emphasizes their architectural or artistic relevance. This legal document meant the culmination of a titanic initiative promoted by the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Finance for the cataloguing of viceregal buildings with artistic and historical value that should be declared as subject to protection (Rodríguez, 2011: 207).<sup>51</sup>

Among the constructions of the viceregal period that were declared in a first group, on February 9, 1931, one can find the cathedral of Mexico and the *sagrario metropolitano*, as well as the former temple of San Lázaro, the church of San Agustín and the Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City. From that date to 1938, 447 historical sites were declared as monument of the nation (Enciso, 1939).

Between 1930 and 1931, Luis Montes de Oca, Minister of the Treasury under the presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles, commissioned a remarkable work for the study and documentation of viceregal architecture of religious nature, focusing on temples owned by the Federal State. Due to the magnitude of the task, he imagined a country divided into various zones whose catalogue of monuments would gradually be completed. The first finished catalogue was the one corresponding to the state of Hidalgo, directed by the engineer Luis Azcué y Mancera, with the collaboration of architects Federico E. Mariscal and Vicente Mendiola (Azcué y Mancera *et al.*, 1942).

The objective of the catalogue was to gather as much historical and geographical data as possible, in addition to including the artistic study and the architectural survey of the monuments. This record also helped catalogue the newly discovered mural paintings in convents founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to the information retrieved by historian Rafael García Granados, the first discovery of mural paintings was made in 1894 by don Eduardo Pineda, the parish priest in charge of the San Agustín temple, in Acolman, in the State of Mexico. He is responsible for a first campaign to uncover the paintings that decorated the Augustinian cloister. Later, Mateo Saldaña and Antonio Cortés, specialized workers from the Office of the General Inspection of Artistic Monuments, continued with the discoveries in the cloister (García y Mac Gregor, 1934: 253). The building was registered in that state by Hugo Brehme's camera, when he was preparing the illustrations for the work *México pintoresco*, published in 1923 (Figure 7).

For the history of conservation of monuments in Mexico from a modern and institutional perspective, Acolman is one of the earliest cases. Located near the archaeological site of Teotihuacán, it was studied as part of an integral cultural circuit, and considered as one of the most touristic attractions in the region (Gamio, 1979).<sup>52</sup> In 1921, it was opened to the public as a local museum for the exhibition of viceregal art objects. From historical photographs from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we know that the large courtyard of the convent was abandoned and covered with vegetation; there was rubble in the south wing of the cloister and the most serious thing was the continuous flooding that affected the building because it was located at one level lower than the atrium and its built environment. The small courtyard had undergone profound transformations throughout the viceregal period. This included added constructions that did not allow the appreciation of the original spatiality and the upper level of the cloister was collapsed, already turned into a ruin. The same happened with the rooms that once occupied the refectory and the ante-refectory in the south wing (Figure 8).

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<sup>51</sup> The direct antecedent to this legal initiative was the one promulgated on April 6, 1914, under the mandate of President Victoriano Huerta.

<sup>52</sup> On Acolman, see volume 3 of Gamio (1979) with information by Antonio Cortés.





FIGURE 7. ACOLMAN, STATE OF MEXICO. Façade of the former convent, ca. 1920. Image: Mediateca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, MID: 77\_20140827-134500:362031, D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.



FIGURE 8. ACOLMAN, STATE OF MEXICO. Large courtyard of the former convent, ca. 1920, before the reconstruction. Image: Mediateca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, MID: 77\_20140827-134500:363408, D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

The architectural rehabilitation was aimed at finding the original floor levels and rebuilding the ruined spaces. The original constructive materials –carved and well-cut ashlar– were gathered in the courtyards in order to recover as many as possible, hoping that they could be reintegrated into the complex from a perspective of reconstruction by anastylosis. This operation was successfully achieved in the larger cloister, where there were fewer losses of construction elements. However, after the reconstruction, the remains of carved ashlars, column shafts and other elements of stone decoration remained as witnesses of a state that could never be re-integrated. Today you can still see vestiges scattered around the museum’s courtyards.

The upper level of the convent was rehabilitated with the roof ceilings on a wooden beam framework, closed with planks and brickwork on the outside. The floors were unified with brickwork, the windowsills and upper moldings were rebuilt. The 16<sup>th</sup> century mural paintings were also uncovered, although the restoration works still continued until the 1960s (Figure 9).



**FIGURE 9. ACOLMAN. UPPER CLOISTER OF THE FORMER CONVENT, BEFORE ITS RESTORATION, ca. 1920.** Image: Mediateca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia/Dominio público, MID: 77\_20140827-134500:359759, D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

In the courtyard, they decided to rebuild a water well and invent a corridor on the perimeter delimited by a small wall which imitated the temple’s top battlements. With this detail, the circulation of visitors was resolved, and at the same time the courtyard of Acolman was homologated with other Augustinian cloisters that still conserved their sources from the Viceregal period, helping to recreate the idea of the “convent-fortress”, which for many years was present in research focusing on convent architecture.



A little later but with the same spirit of recovery of the viceregal religious monuments, the Dirección de Monumentos Coloniales y de la República<sup>53</sup>, led by artist Jorge Enciso, coordinated an investigation to produce monographs on the convent complexes. For this project, the participation of historians, architects, and art historians with a wide academic experience was sought, and it was inaugurated with the work of Rafael García Granados and Luis Mac Gregor on the former convent of San Miguel Arcángel in Huejotzingo, Puebla, who dedicated several years to the documentation, study, rehabilitation, and restoration of the complex.

García Granados had been appointed honorary inspector of artistic monuments in Huejotzingo by Jorge Enciso also due to his extensive knowledge of the region as an agronomist and administrator of the Cháhuac farm, located on the slopes of the Iztaccíhuatl volcano. The former convent of San Miguel Arcángel Huejotzingo, was placed in 1922 under the responsibility of the Dirección de Monumentos Coloniales y de la República, with the idea of protecting it, both from the interventions that the religious orders carried out in the building, and from the destruction caused by the use of a part of the convent as a municipal jail.

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the atrium of the former convent of Huejotzingo was covered with vegetation and still housed the local cemetery (Figure 10). The church maintained its ritual use, and it had been subject to various changes to adjust it to the taste of the each period. The last intervention consisted in the placement of a baldachin of Neo-classical style in the area of the presbytery which had cut the central part of the altarpiece that decorates the apse. The latter is a notable work of Flemish Mannerism in New Spain, dated 1580 as recorded in the painting of María Magdalena that is located in the predella of the altarpiece with the signature of Simón Pereyans (a Flemish artist active in New Spain between 1568 and 1589).



FIGURE 10. HUEJOTZINGO, PUEBLA. COURTYARD OF THE FORMER CONVENT, ca. 1930. Image: Mediateca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, MID: 77\_20140827-134500:364783, D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

<sup>53</sup> Office of Colonial and Republic Monuments (note from the translator).



This baldachin, along with the balustrade, niches, and other neo-Classic decorations in white with gold that decorated the apse, was removed during the first restorations. The same occurred with the deteriorated stone floor that marked the traffic through the center of the nave and the altar tables that invaded the space of the church. This was replaced by a floor composed of large gray stone slabs.

In the convent, the roof of the *portería* was demolished and the right span of the double arcade was opened through which access to the convent was given in viceregal times. In the historical photographs it is possible to see that the opening had been closed and the masonry had received an irregular render, which covered the original architectural details. With the retrieval of the opening and the cleaning of the walls, the spatiality of the so-called pilgrim's portal was recovered, and the carved quarry that decorates the archivolt was left exposed. Its design constitutes a notable example of the decoration of the building, interlacing vegetal, geometric, and animal forms derived from the cultural exchange that operated during the first century of evangelization in New Spain.

In the cloister of the convent, the pavements of the corridors were replaced with brick screeds, following the *petatillo* design that had been detected in the best-preserved rooms. The courtyard was reconstructed by means of four narrow corridors, arranged according to the cardinal axes from the center, which is occupied by an octagonal fountain. This distribution, typical of some 16<sup>th</sup> century convents, as well as the design of the cloister corridors with *petatillo* brickwork, would be repeated as a conventional solution during the rehabilitation and restoration of other convents. This was the case of the work carried out by architect José Gorbea Trueba in the ensembles of San Juan Evangelista Culhuacán, in Mexico City (Gorbea, 1959), and in San Nicolás Tolentino de Yurirapúndaro, in Guanajuato (Gorbea, 1960).

## Conclusions

Through the panorama outlined in this work, one can see that the processes of heritage reconstruction that have commonly been applied mostly to ruined ensembles, have also been extended to monuments of a historical nature, due precisely to the discontinuity in their significance from the perspective of symbolic use, which in Mexico has derived from the country's own history when passing from a Colonial regime to an independent nation.

In Mexico, the reconstruction of historical heritage coincides with what Nicholas Stanley-Price points out about the weight of the notion of national symbolic value for the recovery, reinterpretation, and reinvention of buildings, part of a political propaganda program that champions contemporary positions through the remembrance of convenient passages in history. The reconstructions that began in the decades of 1920-1930 were based rather on the idea of the defense of miscegenation as the foundational basis of Mexican society. The larger works of the post-revolutionary cultural project of José Vasconcelos resorted to the neo-Colonial style or alternatively contemplated the adaptation and reconstruction in style as a symbol of the hybrid nation, such as in the building of the Ministry of Public Education and the Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo, to give paradigmatic examples.

On the other hand, the interventions carried out from the process of inscription as heritage for the legal protection of buildings and historical sites, were directed much more towards the need to give a useful life to buildings, restore their function or reuse them, which is also, as Stanley-Price has pointed out, one of the most recurrent justifications for the extensive intervention of historical ensembles.

Very free mimetic reconstructions and neo-Colonial works were the norm rather than the exception during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Mexico. The pending task is to analyze and make these interventions visible in their ideological character, since their own mimetic intention has generated a kind of invisibility, and we should not lose sight of the new waves of eagerness to rebuild the Colonial past in recent years.

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